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Creative discipline through movement

Discipline problems ideally should not occur in the classroom, which is designed for education, not necessarily mediation—but problems do occur. Students have personality conflicts, unresolved frustrations, difficulties with control of impulses, responses to activities they don't like, peer social needs and demands, uneven development in different areas, and just plain "stuck" places and times. Cultural and environmental influences also impact on students' temperaments: windy days, anticipated holidays, role differentiation, and so on.

Learning problems and discipline problems seem to go hand in hand. When students encounter a problem that is too much for their current resources, they are more likely to retreat to a familiar stress response, two extremes being either a withdrawn, apathetic response or an explosive cha-

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otic response in a difficult learning situation. All of the activities in this book can be viewed as preventive, creating a learning environment that is most likely to be harmonious, well paced, and fun. The following activities are designed more for those breakthrough times when “the best laid plans. . . .”

The emphasis in this section is to develop strategies for discipline problems that increase the student’s sense of mastery and self-esteem, assist in resolving the problem, and build bridges for further growth in identified areas.

A Word on Short Interventions

Several activities in this book can be adapted for exploring discipline issues. These are listed in the *Index*. A few additional notes might be useful for your implementation of movement for conflict resolution. The “Flying Free” activity in Chapter 1 can be adapted to interpersonal conflicts by having each person take a position that expresses his or her view of or stand on the situation, then following the remainder of the activity as described. All of the problem-solving activities can be used to shift and expand perspective in a discipline issue, particularly the first variation of “Sea Trees” in Chapter 6.

Impulse control is a problem that teachers mention often in discussions of major discipline issues. A short intervention that can be very effective, especially for angry outbursts, is to have the students imagine that the thing they are upset about is out in front of them, making it even bigger. Then, taking a huge breath, they can blow it over, out of the room, against the wall, whatever. Usually two or

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three blowouts will defuse the impulse. Walking backwards will also create the same effect, and teachers have used this intervention on the playground as well as in the classroom. For example, when two students come running up yelling "He hit me"; "Well, he called me a name!", the teacher can respond, "Okay, Bill and Charlie, I want you to walk backwards all the way to that tree and then come back and we'll talk." By the time they've walked backwards, the initial disturbance most often dissolves.

Some quick interventions in the initial phase of the problem can often defuse and actually transform the interaction. Acknowledging another person's feelings is a key step. Completing the phrase, "Right now I feel _____" in movement several times in succession with adversaries exchanging active and listening roles is fundamental to shifting from a stuck place. Learning to listen is a difficult and essential part of growing up and a skill that this brief interchange can develop. Teachers have mentioned projection as a major issue in discipline, the student's view that everything is someone else's fault. This short activity emphasizes response-ability for one's feelings, as do subsequent experiments. We recommend it as an introduction to any of the following activities.

ECHOES

TO THE LEADER How would you feel if you were the other person? The answer to this question is part of critical learn-

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ing skills and also essential to conflict resolution. This experiment gives the participants an active chance to walk in another's shoes. It's easiest to introduce in partners, and can also be used in a group to follow one leader.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Pair up and find some open space in the room. Partner One, begin walking through the room in your most familiar walk, striding out just the way you feel right now . . . great. Now Partner Two, your job is to echo Partner One's walk. Walk right behind your partner and take some time to let your head, shoulders, elbows, hips, knees, and feet move just the way Partner One's do. How fast or slowly is your partner walking? How big is the stride? How does the weight shift from one foot to the other? Take some time to study your partner's walk.

(1-3 minutes.)

When you feel you've got it, signal your partner so he or she can stop walking and watch you being the echo.

Now switch. Partner Two, you walk the way you're feeling right now, and Partner One, you begin to echo your partner's walk.

(Repeat some of above questions.)

VARIATION In addition to echoing their partners' walks, have the students hum to themselves the rhythm and tone of the walk. They can often discover new qualities of movement by finding the hum that fits.

THE RUMBLE

TO THE LEADER Sometimes pushing up against another person seems inevitable. This activity is designed for the two students who always end up in the corner punching it out. You'll probably find that many students want to play this game. The structure is very important in this activity, as is *agreement* to follow the rules. You'll be the referee. Fight music such as "The Rumble" from *West Side Story* is evocative and also establishes the activity as ritual or drama.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Okay, everyone who wants to rumble, gather over here. These are the rules: (1) No touching. You'll need to be very alert so you can help your partner with this one. Anyone who touches is out. (2) Each person takes a turn. One person gets to take a swing at the other, and that person has to fall down. Then the faller gets to take a swing, and the other person falls down. Back and forth, as many times as you like (*or you structure, perhaps four turns each*). (3) Move in slow motion. You're going to make your swings as puffed up as you want, like karate or boxing or whatever, but you must swing in slow motion, as though you were underwater. (4) Go one pair at a time. The rest of you will watch and help by actively being present for the two who are rumbling. Any questions? All right, who wants to be first?

COMMENT You may need to demonstrate with a partner the process of responding to another's swing or push, so that participants understand that half the game is being closely aware of their partner's movement.

UNDERWORDS

TO THE LEADER In a conflict, words can sometimes create an endless circle of blame and rejoinder. This simple activity is useful in such an impasse and can be interjected into daily activities without preparation or a change of setting.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Let's continue what we're saying, but without using words. Take turns making a statement, expressing whatever you're feeling about this, your viewpoint, the way you see it. But let your *body* say it . . . no words. When your partner is moving, use your whole body to listen and respond. Wait for a nonverbal signal from your partner to make your next statement.

(Continue for 1-3 minutes.)

VARIATION Conduct the "conversation" with crayons or pastels on large butcher paper or newspaper end rolls, encouraging participants to let the whole body move as they make their statements on paper.

IN AND OUT

TO THE LEADER This activity is for the individual student, and several students or the whole classroom can participate simultaneously. This experiment is useful for times when a student feels cornered or boxed in by a situation. To create a situation where the solution is internally gen-

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erated can build an increased sense of self-esteem and inner control.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Move quickly to a place in the room where you have just the right amount of space around you. Good. Close your eyes and let yourself breathe into the space around you for a moment. Pretend that this thing you're dealing with right now has an actual shape and size. Let it become a form all around you. Let your hands reach out and explore this thing. Notice what texture it has . . . rough, ripply, smooth. How close to your body is it? Can you stand up?

(Continue for 30-60 seconds.)

Now, keeping your eyes closed, can you find or create some kind of opening to get out of this shape? Imagine just the perfect way out for you right now. And get out!

(30-60 seconds.)

Great . . . now that you're out, what would you like to do with this shape? Let's take a few minutes to share our experiences.

COMMENT There's a possibility that a student might not readily find an opening. You can ask what assistance she or he needs, a helper or wizard or parent or ladder, then invite that student to imagine the helper in the shape with her or him.